

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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NO. 4.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

"Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," 2 Cor. iii. 17.

"And all things are of God who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. xi. 12. 2 Cor. v. 18.

A right understanding of the above propositions will lead us to perceive that moral liberty is perfectly reconcilable with philosophical necessity; and that there is no more opposition or contradiction between them than there is between the divine attributes, justice and mercy.

A writer in the last Messenger, page 10, says, "Whether man be a free or necessary agent, is a question in the highest degree interesting." Granted: but then it will be perceived that the writer, "C.," has no idea that man can be both; i. e. both a free and necessary agent; which I apprehend is the fact; and all the difficulty of C. seems to be in giving the word *necessity* a different construction from what I conceive philosophers generally mean by that term, especially when they apply it to the moral actions of men. If man be a free agent, he is necessarily a free agent, neither is it in his power, while he exists and has his reason, to be any thing else than a free moral agent; or to act in any other moral sense than that of acting freely. Now this is all that Necessarians mean by the laws of philosophical necessity. They mean nothing more than the absolute certainty of an action or event; and it makes no difference in this argument what it is that makes the event certain; suffice it to say, it is certain, and if certain, it is necessarily so, let its certainty be produced in any way whatever. That C. does not understand this subject, to me is evident, by his saying "neither does this certainty of an event, in any sort imply its necessity;" when, as we understand it, its certainty and its necessity are one and the same thing. C. should have gone to the works of Hartly, Priestley and others, who believe

in philosophical necessity, for a definition of what they meant by the term, and not to Reid, Clarke and others who were opposed to it. And if he will understand by it the certainty of an event, (and I really conceive that nothing more is necessarily embraced in the idea,) he will find himself involved in all the difficulty which he imagines is attached to this subject.

Having corrected this one idea, it is almost unnecessary to point out the mistakes which have grown out of it, which C. will be as able to correct for himself, as the writer of this article.

C. says, "the foreknowledge of an event does not, however, *cause* the certainty of that event." Granted: but then the foreknowledge of an event *proves* the certainty of that event; and if the event be certain, the means or causes, whatever they may be supposed to be, are all as certain as the event; they must be so, unless we can suppose that a certain event can be produced by uncertain means or causes! to suppose which, would, I apprehend, be unphilosophical. C. says, that "the doctrine of necessity directly charges God with being the author or first cause of all the sins of mankind." But no more than the doctrine of liberty or free-agency, admitting that man is dependent on God for that liberty or free-agency by which (as certainly was foreseen to be the case,) he commits sin. If God has given man liberty or free-agency, and that free-agency commits sin, it proves God to be the author or "first cause" of sin, as directly as can be proved by any doctrine of necessity ever advanced by man. The fact is, in the sense in which it may be said that God is the author of any thing, in that sense that thing cannot be sin. Hence it is impiety to consider God in any sense the author of sin. So far as an act stands in relation to God, no sin can be attached to it. When we think of Jesus' being delivered up according to the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," we do not think of

any sin in the act, i. e. with regard to the Deity. But when we think of the "wicked hands," by which he was taken, "crucified, and slain," then the foreknowledge and counsel of God are not thought of, neither are they taken into the account; and we consider the act just as wicked as though God had not determined any thing on the subject. The same observations will apply to every sinful act ever committed by man.

The case stated by C. will by no means apply; for God never could have intended "producing a certain good" by an action which he foresaw would not be committed, and therefore there is no danger of his being "foiled in his intentions." The real actions of men only, i. e. such as they will actually commit, God foresees, and no other. And it makes no difference in this argument whether he foresees them intuitively, or whether he foresees them by reasoning from cause to effect; suffice it to say, that he foresees them, and of course they are certain. And it remains for C. to show how that which is certain, according to the foreknowledge of God, is avoidable by the free-agency of man. When this is done, we are ready to argue with him further on the subject. A.

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.

TO "PRIESTLEY."

SIR,—Out of your *rejoinder*, in the last Magazine,* we shall select some particulars, on which we wish to bestow as much notice as may be necessary to give a proper direction to further enquiry. You "ask for a definition of personal identity;" and proceed to argue, that "if it includes the idea of remembering the deeds done in the body, from the beginning of our rational existence, so long as we shall exist, that it is reasonable and Scriptural to believe that we shall *feelingly* remember, in the future world, all our good deeds done in this and likewise all our bad ones; the former with pleasure and delight;

* See page 11, of the Christian Messenger.

the latter, with remorse and displeasure; and thus be rewarded and punished in the established course of nature and divine providence, exactly according to the deeds done in the body."

However plausible, dear Sir, this reasoning may appear, at first view, we think on a careful examination, that it requires more to be said, than you have offered to render it entirely safe to adopt your conclusion.

With a view to come directly to the subject, we say that we dispute its being either reasonable or Scriptural to believe that we shall, in the future world and to all eternity remember our evil deeds, done in this world, "with remorse and displeasure." And we further add, that we do not believe that our happiness in the eternal world will be derived from a recollection of our good works done in this. If you, dear Sir, are as sure that your reasoning is good on this subject, as the manner of your writing seems to indicate, you will not fail to favour us with a sample of your reasoning by which you support your system; and furthermore, we expect you will present us, from the Scripture testimony, undoubted authority for such a belief. We readily grant that our recollection, while here in the flesh, of the wrongs which we have done, gives us mental pain, while the remembrance of good actions affords us rational satisfaction. But here, dear Sir, we should do well to call up certain questions, a fair investigation of which will assist us in understanding the wisdom and goodness of our Creator, in so constituting us, that we should be subject to sorrow and gladness from such causes. Is it because our heavenly Father delights in those feelings of torture, which afflict the mind with the remembrance of wrongs, that he has so constituted us? We are sure that the rational views which you entertain, of the divine goodness, will not allow you to answer this question in the affirmative. Then let us ask why he, who is all goodness, has rendered the feelings of our hearts vulnerable to sorrow for wrongs committed? The answer is evident; it is so, in order to bring us to repentance and reformation, and that it may operate to guard us from indulging those temptations which would lead us to repeat the same crimes. It is not because God takes pleasure

in the pain which we feel from a contusion of our flesh, that he has subjected us to this pain; but it is so, that it may keep us on our guard to avoid being wounded, and to incite us to heal a wound already received, as soon as possible. When one, who has at sometime received a most painful wound, recollects the accident, it produces a most disagreeable feeling through the whole system of the body; and this feeling will naturally render him cautious to avoid danger. But, my dear Sir, will it be necessary in an immortal state to have the same feelings excited by a remembrance of the wound? Shall we in the eternal world need these warnings to excite our caution? If this mortal ever puts on immortality, will the immortal constitution be subject to those contusions which wound our dying flesh? You will, no doubt, acknowledge that the immortal state will not be subject to these infirmities.—Then what benefit can be derived from the continuance of this disagreeable sensation produced by a recollection of an accident which happened to the mortal body? By this reasoning in relation to our physical or natural existence, we are directed to understand why God has so constituted our moral state, in this world, as that the recollection of moral wrong should give us mental pain. But in order to carry the necessity of this mental pain into the eternal world, we must suppose that we shall there be subject to temptation, which if not guarded against, by the painful recollection of wrongs done in a mortal state, will be indulged to the defiling of our moral characters. A train of reasoning similar to this, on the subject of our recollecting our good deeds with pleasing sensations, will eventuate in a similar conclusion.

We shall not attempt to show, that the argument which you have presented us, is no more favoured by the testimony of Scripture than it is by reason; for we should not be required to do this until you shall have presented those passages on which you rest those conclusions, which embrace the endless wretchedness of every true penitent!

Having thus noticed the essence of your rejoinder, we will only add one argument, which naturally grows from a statement of yours. You say; "where Joseph says to his brethren, 'Now,

therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me,' he meant undoubtedly to comfort them all in his power." Now, dear Sir, what does this statement amount to? Does it not suppose that if it had been in the power of Joseph to do away every painful feeling of his brothers' minds he would have willingly done it? And that it would have been morally right so to do? If so, are you prepared to say that he, who organized our moral nature, and can control every faculty of the soul as he pleases, cannot in his own time and way, erase every painful feeling from the heart that shall forever love and adore him? Especially if in that immortal world there will exist no temptations nor corresponding passions which would lead into sin, if not held back by the painful recollection of crime long ago repented of and forgiven?

FROM THE SAME.

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL REFLECTIONS.

We have exerted ourselves in the demonstration of national and patriotic feelings, in the celebration of the great anniversary of our National Independence. Freedom from tyranny and oppression, and the enjoyment of rational liberty, are subjects which have called into action many noble sentiments and feelings. Let us now turn our thoughts to the consideration of our religious and moral standing. Are we free and independent in a religious sense? Or are we slaves to the traditions of bigotry and superstition? Do not thousands of Americans, who glory in the political doctrine of the equal rights of man, profess to believe in a creed which teaches that God created some of the human family to glorify him in the enjoyments of everlasting bliss, and others to glorify him in endless woe? Are there not many among us, who glory in that declaration, that all men are born free, in a political sense, and yet tenaciously contend that all mankind are born into the world under the bondage of sin occasioned by Adam's transgression? Do not many, who deny the political doctrine of hereditary privileged orders among men, hold to the notion of hereditary moral guilt? Are we free from the tyrannical reign of our blind passions? Are we

free and independent in a moral sense? Or, do we live slaves to those vices which degrade our nature, enfeeble our faculties, and torture our consciences? How trifling would be the oppressions of an earthly monarch compared with the severity of the cruel servitude of sin!

God grant, that the independence of our nation may remain forever; and may his mercy be manifested in our deliverance from the tyranny, error, and cruel servitude of sin.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, August 26, 1820.

Philosophical Necessity reconcilable with Moral Liberty.

That all events, that is, all the actions of men, are not necessary in a moral, but only in a philosophical sense, I trust will be admitted by all. That is, all events are not necessary in the same sense as it is necessary that a man should be virtuous if he would be happy: but they are only necessary because they are connected with causes which are not perceived by us, or if perceived, they are causes over which we have no control, and may be traced through a concatenating chain of causes and effects, up to the great first or immutable cause of all things.

This reasoning is so clear and conclusive, that the moment the idea of philosophical necessity is given up, every inch of ground is given up on which any one could consistently dispute an *Atheist*. For if any thing takes place wholly disconnected from the first immutable cause, it takes place independently of God; and if one event takes place in this way, why may not two, ten, or ten thousand? And why may not all things be accounted for in the same way? This would be complete *Atheism*!—and let others judge how near they come to this when they break off the chain which links, combines, and controls all actions in one system of supreme theocracy, and set men to work with an agency that is in no sense connected with the eternal mind! “A man’s heart divideth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.” Prov. xvi. 9.

If all things are connected, it is only

to know the nature of all, and all may be calculated to a certainty. But if they are disconnected, how came they to be broken off; and what supports them in being since they were severed from the parent stock? Or if there never were any such connections, then we have found more than one thing that is self-existent; and if more than one, why may we not suppose all things to be self-existent? On this principle we should discover neither sin nor virtue in the universe, as every thing must act agreeably to its own nature without the least regard to any thing else! These are difficulties flung in the way of those who fancy they possess free-agency or liberty by which they can do one thing or another indifferently at the same time, and all circumstances remaining the same. It is not expected that all will be equally capable of understanding the force of these objections: they are designed for those who are capable of understanding them: and to those, and those only, they will be of use. All will be able to perceive, however, that the difficulties are much greater than any which can be brought against the doctrine of *necessity*, if we understand by that term noting more than *inevitable consequence*, or certainty of events, which must be admitted by all who acknowledge the divine presence or foreknowledge of God.

We shall now proceed to answer the objections which C. has urged against the doctrine of necessity. See page 11.

1st. This doctrine so far from degrading the dignity of man, it is the only doctrine which secures his happiness; i. e. by placing him in a moral relation with the Deity, where he is governed by those immutable laws which cannot fail to answer the divine purpose. He is passive only in relation to events and things which are beyond his knowledge, and therefore concerning which he is not accountable; he is active in a small sphere, and on a limited scale, circumscribed by his limited knowledge, in which he always acts freely, and therefore, in the same limited sense, he is accountable for his actions. Hence, when the doctrine is understood, the argument of Hobbes will be found to be perfectly consistent, without the least appearance of “sophistry.”

2d. Notwithstanding all the actions of men are of necessary consequence,

if we consider all the circumstances relating to them, and causes connected with them, yet they are not necessary in the same sense that they are free; but when we consider them as free, there are many circumstances and causes which have more or less bearing upon them which are not taken into the account: it is in the sense, therefore, in which actions are free, that either virtue or vice can exist; and as we acknowledge that all moral actions are free in a certain sense, and to a certain extent, so this doctrine gives room for all the virtue and vice to exist which does exist, or can exist, in moral beings. Yea, virtue and vice can exist consistent with the doctrine of necessity as well as with the doctrine of liberty; for the doctrine of necessity admits all the liberty which can be maintained without admitting man to be an independent being.

3d. Man is rewarded or punished on the supposition that he acts freely, and no other; for in no other sense is he accountable for his actions: but, beyond this sphere of action, in the great system of nature in which man acts by necessary consequence, all his actions are to be ascribed to a higher power under which they are overruled for good; and in this sphere all that might have been before termed either reward or punishment are only so many acts of God done for the good of his creatures without the least regard to their merit or demerit. Hence, if people would not blend things together which ought to be kept perfectly distinct, there would be no difficulty in this subject, but all would appear perfectly clear and consistent.

4th. The doctrine of necessity is not prejudicial to morality; as a proof of which we may appeal to the lives of those who have believed, as well as those who still believe in it, whose characters will suffer nothing by a comparison with those who hold to a contrary doctrine, as in point of morality, no people are more correct. The doctrine of necessity admits of all the liberty that any one can contend for short of making man an independent or self-existent being. We do not see, nor yet perceive, the invisible hand which moves us, and therefore directs our steps; hence, so far as conscience is concerned, we act freely, and as freely as we could act if we were independent;

and this is as far as is necessary for morality. Repentance is only a means of reformation, and is necessary to that end; but when a man is completely reformed and does that which is lawful and right, there is no reason why he should repent; yea, it would be as sinful to repent of doing right, as it is not to repent of doing wrong. The doctrine of necessity, therefore, however true, is not likely to be believed by wicked immoral men; for it will be hard to convince such men that they are impelled by any law of necessity to do as they do!—and should they ever be so convinced, it would be likely to humble them to that degree, that they would no longer feel a disposition to commit sin.

The laws of necessity by no means take away the desires of man, neither do they destroy his consciousness of right and wrong; because it is necessary that he should have those desires, and that consciousness; and therefore while he possesses them they must be exercised. So far from this doctrine rendering the sinner "careless of the correction of his conduct," it will be more likely to render him (or rather the saint) careful not to commit a crime. It was well said, therefore, by Dr. Priestley, "It does require strength of mind not to startle at such a conclusion, but, only strength of mind." That is, (to express the same idea in different words,) to believe that the eye of omniscience is constantly upon us, and the hand of omnipotence constantly moveth us in all that we do! But however such an idea may appear to weak minds, if such were realized by all to be the truth, sin would no longer exist.

Thus much we have thought proper to add on this subject; and as the writer A., page 13, said nothing by way of reply to the objections of C., we thought that the above remarks would not be unacceptable.

How can "Christ be the Saviour of all men," without all men are saved by him?—*Gospel Herald*.

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A title page and contents of the first volume of the Christian Messenger are now printed, and may be had of the carrier, or by applying at No. 343 Market street.

MARRIED,

By the Right Rev. Bishop White, Mr. JOHN G. BIDDLE to Miss MARY BIDDLE, daughter of Charles Biddle, Esq.

By the Rev. Mr. Kneeland, Mr. AARON P. LAMBERSON to Miss EMMA ROYSTON. Mr. CASIMIR LHULIER to Miss MARY TRUMAN.

OBITUARY.

It becomes our painful duty to record the death of Mr. STEPHEN SIMMONS, æt. 46, an active member of the First Universalist Church, in this city, and president of the singing choir,—also a Proprietor of the Christian Messenger. Most heartily we sympathize with his disconsolate widow, and afflicted children; long will his death be felt by the Church and Society of which he was an amiable and worthy member.

POETS' CORNER.

SOLILOQUY.

IN FIVE PARTS.

Written by the Rev. Mr. —, during the last sickness and death of his wife and infant child.

[No other apology is necessary for the unpolished dress of the following lines, than their being the spontaneous effusions of a sorrowing heart. They were all written at the different periods they indicate; the first part was written nearly six months before the death of the persons who were the subjects of them; the second, between three and four months; the third, about three months; the fourth, nearly two months; and the last, as will be perceived, was written after their death. The death of the mother took place just one week after that of the child, which happened in January, 1806.]

Part First.

In pensive thought and deep distress,
I sit a musing all alone;
With pained heart and troubled breast
I meditate and think of home—

All nature hush'd in shades of night,
While slumber steals away their sight.

Hard by my side my consort lays,
With visage pale, and hollow breath;
Faint in her speech, her flesh decays,
Which all bespeak approaching death:
Consumptive cough! a deadly groan!
Piercing my heart, I daily moan!

A few more days, or weeks at most,
And she must quit this house of clay;
The summons comes, obey she must,
To unknown worlds she'll wing her way;
For ever happy may she be,
From sin and death and bondage free.

Part Second.

A few more days I now have seen,
Fill'd with anxiety and fear;
In some degree I change my theme,
A gleam of hope doth now appear:—
When hope was gone, deliverance come,
And blest me with a living son!!

To God I now will lift my prayer,
O spare the mother! spare the child
On thee alone I cast my care,
O thou who hast in mercy smil'd;
Vouchsafe thy mercy still to give,
And let this child and mother live.

In great suspense I now remain,
No certain knowledge can be had;
Should health return to her again,
'T would be like one rais'd from the dead
'Twixt hope and fear I now must wait,
Until I know her certain fate.

Part Third.

Once more my pen resumes its theme,
For hope appears to win the day;
My soul with rapture fill'd within,
Those gloomy thoughts have fled away.
I now foretaste the welcome days,
When health shall fill my theme with praise.

So when the storm is overblown,
The mariner doth quit his fear;
Although the billows roll along,
He drinks his glass with merry cheer;
Anticipates th' approaching calm,
And sleeps away the past alarm.

But Oh! how often is the case,
Before he sleeps a single hour,
The storm returns with doubled pace,
More rapid than it was before?
In darkness hurl'd, the ship is toss'd,
O'erwhelm'd in waves, and all is lost!

So this may also be my doom,
Elated, therefore, I'll not be;
Nor think the danger is all gone,
Until returning health I see:
Then will I praise my God above,
Impressed with his tender love.

Part Fourth.

Alas! how soon my hope is fled!
No more to cheer my drooping heart!
My wife confined to her bed,
My child must also soon depart:
The die is cast! they both must go,
And bid adieu to all below!

Into thine arms, O God above,
I now resign them up to thee;
Depending on thy boundless love,
For life to all eternity—
Take what's thy own, not mine to give,
In thee, my wife and child shall live.

Part Fifth.

Adieu! adieu! a long adieu!
They now are gone beyond my sight!
By faith their spirits I can view,
Behold, and trace them in their flight;
Up to the hosts of bliss' abode,
To dwell forever with their God.*

And in the resurrection morn,
The trump shall sound and they arise;
The mortal then shall be adorn'd,
With immortality likewise;
The grave shall give the vict'ry o'er,
And hell† and death shall be no more.

* It will be perceived, that the writer at this time believed in an intermediate state between death and the resurrection.
† Hosea xiii. 14. original.

PRINTING

Neatly executed at this Office